

March 12, 2025

HB 1003

North Dakota House Appropriations Committee

Testimony from Amy Boyd, Anti-Trafficking Program Manager, Youthworks

Chairman Wanzek and Members of the Committee:

My name is Amy Boyd; I am the Anti-Trafficking Program Manager for Youthworks; a non-profit agency that serves youth, ages twelve to twenty-four. I have come before you today in support of House bill 1003.

Attached to this summary, you will find supporting budgetary information and statistics on victim services. One of the things I would like to highlight is the number of rural communities in North Dakota where victims were located and services were provided; 32% of North Dakota counties have been served as well as all 8 regions, representing every corner of North Dakota. (including nearly every one of your districts). We have provided services to clients in communities that are so small that I am not naming them, due to the concern of confidentiality. Trafficking victims were served from all five reservations: Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara, Standing Rock, Spirit Lake, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. Youth living in rural, isolated areas, as well as those youth who experience poverty and sexual abuse, are extraordinarily vulnerable to traffickers who use those risk factors to groom and exploit

them. It is critical that trafficked youth in these rural communities have access to support, education and resources.

Youthworks has been part of Anti-Trafficking efforts in North Dakota since 2015, and has received both state and federal funds to provide services to victims since 2017. The funds that Youthworks receives from the Attorney General's budget are critical to ensuring that all of North Dakota's youth victims of human trafficking receive the care and support they deserve. As a non-profit, we leverage our Attorney General funds as "match" money for federal grants- essentially tripling the impact of state dollars.

For every \$1 North Dakota invests, Youthworks receives \$3 in federal funding to support youth victims of human trafficking. This biennium Youthworks has the opportunity to bring in \$1,570,000 in federal money to support youth victims. This level of federal funding requires \$525,000 in match funding. (or 262,500 per year). We do not want to leave federal funding on the table.

The combination of state funds used as match and federal funds ensures that victims have access to a comprehensive human trafficking service model, regardless of where they live, including in rural areas of the state. These funds allow for the anti-trafficking efforts of eight professionals across the state who provide support, therapy, mentorship, and shelter to youth victims of trafficking. Currently, Youthworks has anti-trafficking program personnel in Minot, Dickinson, Bismarck and Fargo who travel to surrounding rural areas to provide services to victims in their communities. Our staff are part of an on call rotation 24 hours a day, 7 days a

week to ensure that these victims are being responded to in a victim-centered manner.

Since July 1, 2023, Youthworks served 147 suspected or confirmed victims of human trafficking. Most youth were victims of sex trafficking (75% sex, 17% sex and labor, and 8% labor). The majority of youth were also survivors of other crime, with child sexual abuse, child abuse/neglect, and family violence being the most common. Of the youth victims served at Youthworks, 48 were also experiencing homelessness. Youthworks provided these youth with additional housing support, including 3,196 nights of housing. If it were not for the housing dollars that Youthworks receives, those trafficked youth would be at the mercy of their traffickers, as most trafficking victims, once they leave their trafficker, are homeless.

Other services that Youthworks provides include trauma therapy, emotional support, and advocacy. In the last biennium, nearly 400 hours of clinical services were provided as well as 1,800 hours of crisis intervention.

The dollars that we received from the Attorney General's budget has allowed us to walk alongside these youth as they work to recover from their trafficking experience and to support them as they cooperate with Law Enforcement investigations during their trafficker's prosecution.

I ask today that you approve the proposed budget in HB 1003 so that we can continue the important work we're doing for these North Dakota youth.